

# Tough Love

Tears, torment and trauma – the Hoffman Process might not be easy but it will transform your life, says Susan Montpelier

**A**rogant, good-looking alpha males have always been my nemesis. The emotionally abusive cad disguised as a charmer. I recently realised that after several years of hell, having been in yet another mentally abusive relationship, I could not live with the daily verbal abuse and the constant fear. Some seemingly inoffensive thing I might do would be the catalyst for yet more nasty remarks and anger. He clearly was suffering from manic depression, a condition more commonly referred to today as bipolar. That, however, did not answer the question of why I allowed myself to be treated so cruelly and

## Some of the techniques used:

- Role play
- Aversion therapy
- Visualisations
- Journal writing
- Art therapy
- The Hoffman Toolkit

moreover allow my young daughter to be a witness to such daily abuse. Prior to this relationship I had two other similar men in my life, whom I allowed to mistreat me.

I broke my own heart and left him, but for the past two years I have felt desolate and sad, despite the relief of gaining my equilibrium and my self respect. No matter how much I have analysed and rationalised the negative patterns of my love life, I still felt damaged and acutely aware that I could get caught up in yet another such love affair.

I could also feel the physical manifestations of living with such tension. Having lived in California for over a decade, I have tried many different therapies and I have been aware of how our bodies store and react to the negative emotions and sadness that we experience. My heart arrhythmia and my awareness of how I constantly hold my breath were symptoms I began to first experience as a child; symptoms I felt were connected in some way to my emotionally turbulent life.

I knew something had to change. And then I heard about the Hoffman Process, so I took the plunge by signing up for their eight-day retreat. This process definitively explained to me why I had been behaving with such self-destruction. The negative conditioning that occurred early in my life resulted in the type of self-defeating behaviour patterns that I had been trapped in for years. Learning to recognise and acknowledge these self-limiting patterns we adopt from our parents, surrogate or otherwise, is one of the fundamental tenets we were to often painfully experience during the retreat.

I realised that understanding the emotional scars in our lives by, for example, going to therapists or reading self-help books might enable us to superficially alleviate the depression, the anger or whatever it is that might be blocking us from our true creativity and success. But what the Hoffman Process offers is an intensive eight-day programme that enables you to identify and eliminate the ingrained negativity that constantly interferes with the way you act and live now. It sounds nothing short of miraculous — but would it actually work?

## Uncharted waters

Walking into the stately hall of Oxon Hoath, one of the two current venues for the Hoffman Process, I was sublimely unaware of the Pandora's box I was about to open. What has been learnt emotionally can only be healed and released emotionally, is the leitmotiv of the Hoffman Process. Little did I

## True Spirit

The Hoffman Process has no affiliations with any conventional religious organisations. There is little trace of any New Age psychobabble, but many of us had to suspend belief when we were guided through a visualisation introducing us to our own unique guru, our very own spiritual guide. My guide appeared miraculously. He WAS there right in front of me. Yes, maybe I did conjure him up, and yes he is of course quite beautiful! Something very powerful happened in that room and it was not just me. One could tangibly feel our emerging spiritual dimension when we were at lunch that day; throughout the Hoffman course we would share informally and sometimes privately our transformational experiences, all of which added to the collective spirit that was clearly evident.

realise how true and bitter sweet these words were to become. Our days were highly structured and incredibly intense. We were a group of 30 and much of the time we worked together, but frequently in smaller groups with our individual therapists and teachers. We made a commitment to ourselves to leave the outside world, which we were encouraged to have no contact with, so no mobile phones, TV or computers. Our entire focus was to be on ourselves; something most of us do not have the time, inclination or luxury to do. However, masturbation is also strictly forbidden — clearly too much self-focus is not necessarily a good thing!

The first half of the course involved uncovering often forgotten memories of our early childhood. From an early age we all adopt certain role-playing personas to often obscure our deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and insecurities. Powerful visualisations, written and verbal assignments, role-playing, journal-writing, psychodramas, artwork, ritual and daily lectures, rebirthing, all contributed to enable us to express and externalise our deep feelings of hurt, anger and loss of innocence. Almost alchemically our group metamorphosed into emotional and often frightened boys and girls. And this was just the first day!

## The parent trap

We were invited through these techniques to prosecute our parents and then cathartically to defend them. This experience of forgiving my parents was truly liberating and one could feel a physical release as well as an emotional freedom. Externalising your positive and negative emotions is intrinsic to the course. Addressing our negative demons was, quite simply, astonishing, both in the methodology used and the subsequent unleashing of suppressed grief, anger, love, hate and pure, unadulterated rage. All the emotions poured out of us as we gave ourselves over not just to finding out about our negative patterns, but pounding them to smithereens (with the help of a stick and cushion to bash — a physicality which is one of the hallmarks of the Hoffman Process.) At times all the ranting and raving felt both ludicrous and overtly violent, but it really does work.

## In the gang

The group dynamics were fundamental for us all. Going so deep into our individual psyches and uncovering our personal



## FACT FILE

### What exactly does the process involve?

- The Hoffman Process uses a melting pot of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual techniques to help you understand how your childhood shapes your beliefs, emotions, attitudes, moods and behaviour in adult life.
- It's based on a mixture of established teachings including: psychodynamic, transpersonal, gestalt, behavioural and cognitive therapies.
- The aim is to sort your life out in the space of eight days rather than spend years on a therapist's couch.
- More than 5,000 people have graduated from the course since it was founded in the UK in 1995, including the likes of Oliver James (author of best-sellers *The Selfish Capitalist*, *Affluenza* and *They F\*\*\* You Up*) and Patrick Holford (founder of the Institute of Optimum Nutrition).
- It's pricey — the course costs £2,350 — but this includes over 100 hours of tuition, all meals and accommodation, four after-care sessions, a CD follow-up kit, a pre-course evaluation, and more than 30 practical techniques.

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demons within the collective group at first felt excruciatingly embarrassing (I certainly never thought I would witness my own conception, yet indeed I did) but somehow it became tremendously cathartic and bonding. We were all on this ride together. We soon discovered that our painful experiences, although different, united us in our determination to set ourselves free from the negative patterns forced upon us by our parents and indeed ancestors, albeit unconsciously.

Resolving issues that result from some aspect of your childhood is paramount to the understanding of — and the cure of — your individual neurosis. Unless these issues are resolved we are destined to live reacting to life unconsciously, trapped in that reaction that radiates from the little child

who was misunderstood or, in many cases, physically abused. In my case, mild bullying from my older brother was part of my daily life as a child, resulting in my susceptibility to permitting such abusive behaviour in my relationships. That child cannot escape, but as adults we can — in our own ways we really can become heroes. We can learn to break the patterns that are handed down through generations, and save both our own lives and those of our children.

## Inner transformation

My experience of the Hoffman Process was at times deeply harrowing and at best truly miraculous. It is a relentless process. There is no respite and nowhere to run. We all at some stage cried — for me it was a daily occurrence. There was a fleeting moment in the initial stages when I wanted to quietly pack my bags and go. I am delighted I did not lose faith. It was a journey of a lifetime, a rite of passage, and I can say with hand on heart that my feelings for emotional cads — past, present or future — have totally changed. The intense combination of shouting, screaming and banging has possibly worked in some curious Pavlovian way so that whenever I think about my ex-boyfriend I feel weirdly devoid of emotion. What a result. And maybe, should I decide that I need a man in my life, he just might have to be a Hoffman graduate! **NH**

Free monthly information evenings about the Hoffman Process are held in Regent's College, London. For more information call 01903 889990 or visit [hoffmaninstitute.co.uk](http://hoffmaninstitute.co.uk).